



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION 10**

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OFFICE OF  
ECOSYSTEMS, TRIBAL AND  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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Mr. Ross Blanchard, Operations Engineer  
Federal Highway Administration, Idaho Division  
3050 Lakeharbor Lane, Suite 126  
Boise, Idaho 83703

Mr. Adam Rush  
Idaho Transportation Department  
Office of Communications  
3311 West State Street  
P.O. Box 7129  
Boise, Idaho 83707

Re: Idaho 16, I-84 to Idaho 44 Environmental Study, Final Environmental Impact Statement and Section 4(f) Evaluation (EPA Region 10 Project Number: 07-024-FHW; CEQ Number: 20110040; ERP Number: FHW-L40238-ID)

Dear Mr. Blanchard and Mr. Rush:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the Idaho 16, I-84 to Idaho 44 Environmental Study, Final Environmental Impact Statement and Section 4(f) Evaluation (FEIS). We are submitting comments in accordance with our responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act. Thank you for the opportunity to offer comment.

In our comment letter on the draft EIS, sent in August of 2009, we expressed concerns about the river and stream corridor habitats, water quality, and ecological connectivity; air quality and near roadway effects; the need for multi-modal components and greenhouse gas reductions; analysis of indirect and cumulative effects with respect to stimulated travel and growth; farmland losses; impacts to groundwater; and the need to prevent spread of invasive species. We appreciate the response to our comments provided in the FEIS, and would like to offer further comment regarding several of the issues addressed:

**Air Quality/Air Toxics**

The FEIS uses the National Ambient Air Quality Standards as the primary determination of impacts under NEPA. While this is a reasonable starting point, there are health impacts below the standard that should be included. For example, the FEIS includes ambient air quality monitoring data indicating that measured ozone is very close to the standard (p. 4-31). However, it does not discuss whether the preferred alternative would have an impact on this pollutant.

The FEIS frequently uses the Idaho Transportation Department Air Screening Policy as the basis for transportation conformity hot spot and air quality impact analysis. Please note that EPA cannot endorse this policy at this time as it has not been reviewed and approved by EPA. It would need to be approved as a 'different procedure' for determining localized carbon monoxide concentrations consistent with 40 CFR 93.123 (a)(1). As a result of reliance on the screening tool, the FEIS does not characterize the project area air quality impacts, particularly the near roadway effects of criteria pollutants and mobile source air toxics (MSATs) that would potentially result from a new proposed 4-lane highway where none currently exists.

*Recommendation:* Disclose these effects in the ROD and discuss the relevance for current and future residents and land uses in the project area.

Construction Mitigation for Air Quality. The FEIS (p. 6-16) states that mitigation measures to reduce effects of project construction are included in Chapter 11, Mitigation. However, mitigation measures appear to be limited to dust suppression only. An important finding of the Portland Air Toxics Assessment (<http://www.deq.state.or.us/eq/toxics/pata.htm>) was the impacts of construction sites on micro scale air quality. These air quality effects can be significant. Air toxics emissions, particularly diesel exhaust, are known or suspected to cause cancer or other serious health effects, such as respiratory, neurological, reproductive, and developmental effects. As stated in the FEIS (p. 5-7) neighborhoods that are the site of major bridge construction activity, such as in the vicinity of Flamingo Road south of I-84, could experience some of these effects for several years.

*Recommendation:* Augment the standard ITD air quality construction specifications to emphasize reducing diesel and other emissions from construction vehicles and equipment. Include a suite of construction mitigation measures, such as those from the Clean Construction USA Web site at <http://www.epa.gov/otaq/diesel/construction/> and commit to their implementation in the Record of Decision (ROD). Measures such as diesel engine retrofit technology in off-road equipment would greatly help to reduce air toxics and diesel particulate emissions. Such technology may include diesel oxidation catalyst/diesel particulate filters, engine upgrades, engine replacements, newer model year equipment, biodiesel, or combinations of these strategies.

### **New Local Roadways**

In addition to the new proposed segment of Idaho 16, the FEIS indicates (p. 3-20) that multiple new local roadways (9.28 miles for the Preferred Alternative 2D) would need to be constructed for public and emergency access to the existing public roadway network in the study area. It is unclear to what extent these new roadways have been factored into the full array of impacts assessed for the proposed project, such as, to surface water, wetlands, and floodplains.

*Recommendation:* Address the impacts from the new local roadways and associated mitigation for their impacts in the Record of Decision (ROD).

## **Wetlands Mitigation**

We appreciate all efforts to avoid impacts to wetlands, particularly in the high value wetland/riverine/riparian/floodplain complex of the Boise River. We are concerned about remaining project specific and cumulative losses/impacts to these resources, particularly for forested wetlands. Also we are concerned that by fixing the length and width of the Boise River crossing bridge at this time, you have eliminated a practicable alternative for avoiding and minimizing wetland impacts. While we appreciate the abutments are placed at the edge of the floodway, your analysis shows a rise in the base flood elevation. Extending the south abutment to the edge of the 100 year FEMA floodplain may prevent this rise.

*Recommendation:* Continue consultation and communication with EPA, the Corps, and other resource agencies to seek ways to further avoid and minimize impacts during final design, and to ensure that proposed mitigation is fully successful. Consider timing the compensatory wetland mitigation in advance of project construction to reduce lag time for achieving wetland functions, particularly for forested and scrub-shrub wetlands.

## **Groundwater**

The FEIS (p. 5-107) discusses potential impacts to groundwater from dewatering. We believe that further discussion of these potential effects is needed, particularly effects to recharge areas, the hyporheic zone, and associated ecological processes and aquatic resources. The mitigation commitments do not address potential dewatering operations and how impacts to groundwater would be minimized.

*Recommendation:* Provide additional disclosure of potential effects in the ROD, and include measures to minimize impacts to groundwater from dewatering operations.

## **Ecological Connectivity**

We appreciate that wildlife passage would be accommodated beneath the new Boise River Bridge and that culverts or other structures would enable passage at Five Mile Creek and Ten Mile Creek. The new proposed highway would also be fenced to prevent animal access to the project right of way (ROW). However, it is unclear whether the fencing plan has been integrated with the bridge and creek wildlife passage sites to enable access to them. It may also be necessary to install escape ramps or gates for animals that may become trapped inside the roadway ROW.

### *Recommendations:*

- Ensure integration of all design plan elements to provide for safe wildlife passage and prevention of wildlife-vehicular collisions.
- Consider these additional opportunities to accommodate wildlife in the proposed project:
  - Wherever possible, accommodate wildlife passage also at the grade separations over the existing irrigation canals located throughout the corridor.

- Evaluate the railroad crossing design at the UPRR tracks (p. 3-20) to determine a means to prevent wildlife mortality due to trains.
- Incorporate bat habitat into the bridge design over the Boise River  
<http://www.batcon.org/index.php/what-we-do/bats-in-bridges.html> .

### **Indirect and Cumulative Effects – Stimulated Travel and Growth**

We have remaining concerns regarding the analysis of cumulative impacts and stimulated travel and growth. We appreciate efforts to analyze cumulative effects, however, the study/analysis area defined in the FEIS for this purpose is not suitably sized to analyze cumulative impacts for all resources; specifically it appears too small to sufficiently analyze the potential effects of stimulated travel and growth from the proposed project. We agree with the statements in the FEIS (p. 5-34) that “with the opportunity to reduce travel time, longer distance travelers would gravitate to a higher speed access-controlled facility such as the proposed Idaho 16” and that “growth may occur at a different (slower) pace in the No Action Alternative conditions than in the Build Alternative conditions”(p. 5-8). These are effects that have implications for stimulated travel and growth in the region. A review of published evidence regarding user response to new road capacity (Pells, 1989) finds that reduced travel time and a new route create the potential for several effects, including:


- Wide area re-assignment, involving re-routing of trips external to the study area;
- Redistribution of trips to different destinations;
- Attraction of trips from other modes (if they exist);
- Re-timing of trips; and
- Generation of trips, consisting of trips that are either new or are made more frequently.

The analysis in the FEIS does not appear to recognize or consider all of these effects, and therefore does not fully disclose the potential impacts of stimulated travel and growth and their associated impacts on the natural environment.

*Recommendation:* Consider and incorporate the above effects in this and future analyses of indirect and cumulative effects of transportation improvements on travel and growth.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Idaho 16, I-84 to Idaho 44 project. If you have questions or would like to discuss these comments, please contact me at (206)553-1601 or Elaine Somers of my staff at (206)553-2966 or at [somers.elaine@epa.gov](mailto:somers.elaine@epa.gov).

Sincerely,



Christine B. Reichgott, Manager  
 Environmental Review and Sediment Management Unit